

## The VE Bulletin Excerpts [Vol 19: No 3 November 2002](#)

### 'Angels of Death' - a crisis of policy

The July 2002 edition of the VE Bulletin carried a review of the book *Angels of death* by Dr Roger Magnusson, Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney.

Members may be interested in some interesting quotations and insights from this important publication:

- 'Even if one assumes that assisted death is largely an AIDS-only phenomenon (which is unlikely), the scope, audacity and complexity of underground euthanasia highlights the crisis of policy.' p 198
- 'Prohibition drives assisted death underground'. p 4
- 'In reality, prohibition neither effectively inhibits the practice of euthanasia, nor adequately protects the vulnerable patients who most desire it.' p 247
- 'The culture of silence spawned by the illicit nature of euthanasia results in a culture of trial and error, or backyard or 'coat-hanger euthanasia'. p 255
- 'Deceptive practises contribute to the invisibility of euthanasia, and help to perpetuate the myth that because euthanasia is prohibited, it never occurs.' p 229
- 'Euthanasia is practised in an informal, intuitive and arbitrary manner. This is dangerous for patients. Abdicating responsibility, and hiding our heads in the sand, just isn't good enough.' p 199
- 'Illegal euthanasia illustrates dramatically what might be called 'medical anti-professionalism'; that is, an absence of appropriate training, an absence of oversight, an absence of accountability, and an absence of principles guiding involvement.' p 229
- 'Unlike therapeutic medical procedures, which are carried out within an organisational and intellectual framework, euthanasia is carried out informally, in an idiosyncratic environment largely lacking in norms or controls.' p 229
- '...it is important to emphasise that actions like these (assisting people to die) are not performed by the freaky fringe. On the contrary, these are closely guarded secrets of well respected health practitioners, people who present impeccably, embody the demeanour of competent professionals and hold positions of status and leadership within the profession.' p 208
- 'From a harm minimisation perspective, legislation has several advantages.' p 268
- 'Any legalised euthanasia regime will also carry its own share of risks...The challenge for opponents, however, is to show how the law's prohibition of voluntary assisted death remains the best policy, despite evidence of underground euthanasia within a culture characterised by the lack of medical professionalism.' p 247

SA parliamentarians have been advised of the publication of this book, a copy of which is held in the parliamentary library. The Dignity in Dying Bill is an opportunity to consider appropriate legislative responses to the reality of underground euthanasia. SAVES has provided each member of the SA Legislative Council with a compendium of important relevant information in support of legislative reform.

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